

# Kroll's still a favorite after 50 years

How does a 10 foot-by-10 foot hamburger joint become a Green Bay institution?

Bite into a Kroll's hamburger and you'll know how. The fresh hard roll ... the charcoal-grilled meat ... the big gob of butter that spills over the sides when you bite into it.

That's the same Kroll's hamburger they paid a dime for in that 10-by-10 stand on East Main Street in 1937.

"And that was a high-priced hamburger," laughs Mrs. Caroline Kroll, who just last week observed her 50th anniversary in the restaurant business. "Most of 'em were only a nickel then. But the only thing that's changed is the price. It's the same hamburger now that it

was then."

Kroll's today takes its place as one of three storied eateries in Green Bay — ranking alongside Kaap's, which is no more, and Chili John's as the vintage stop-for-a-bite-to-eat places in town.

But the thing about Kroll's is its elasticity. The Kroll name has been at five different locations since its beginnings in the old Kustka Hotel in 1931. Preble Kroll's came into existence in 1936 — along with the Kroll hamburger — in the 1800 block of East Main Street. Then there was the move to the Labor Temple in 1939, the sale of Preble Kroll's (still called Kroll's, but not part of the Kroll's operation) in



**Don  
Langenkamp**

Of the Press-Gazette

1945, the construction of Kroll's at 509 E. Main St. in 1958, and, finally, the move to the present location across from Lambeau Field on Ridge Road in 1974.

Whew! That Kroll's hamburger is a survivor, isn't it? Actually it's more than a survivor; it has become succulent but simple sustenance to thousands of folks from Green Bay and outlying areas.

As is true with the birth

of many time-honored institutions, Kroll's was somewhat of a happenstance. Caroline Kroll met her husband, Harry — who was a construction worker on the George Washington Bridge project — in her native New York City and arrived in Green Bay as Mrs. Harry Kroll in 1930.

First there was the Kustka Hotel, which was more of a boarding house operation and certainly not

a mammoth place by New York standards. While Caroline prepared full-course meals for 35 cents, she and her husband never quit looking.

Their next stop was Preble Kroll's, and the birth of the hamburger was to be the foundation of everything that was to come. The Kroll hamburger moved downtown and gained new fans. In 1958, it moved into a brand new restaurant and really got rolling. Two additions and 16 years later, it fell prey to the Gregby Plan and was razed.

To move again, or retire? Harry, who passed away in 1976, and Caroline Kroll were faced with a tough choice. But the family en-

tered into the ultimate decision to build a new place on the West Side. There was daughter Pat (Vander Perren), who had worked in the restaurant since she was 12. And there were grandchildren ready to inject new youth and vigor into the operation.

"Harry and I were split on that," says Caroline. "He wanted to retire then, and I wanted to keep going. As it turned out, I was right. It was hard to leave that place downtown. But everyone said we should have a Kroll's on the West Side, and we finally did."

Now, Pat runs the restaurant and Mike Wier, who is

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Press-Gazette photo by Ken Wesely

Caroline Kroll, right, and her daughter, Pat Vander Perren, at work in the kitchen of Kroll's.

## □ Kroll's favorite

married to Caroline's granddaughter, Roberta, operates the bar. Caroline, 69, will soon formally sell the whole operation to them and Kroll's will formally become a three-generation business.

"If I sold to a stranger, it would be a world of difference," says Caroline. "But this way it keeps the name going."

And it keeps the hamburger the same as it was in 1937. And it keeps something in Green Bay that counts, because it's identified with by residents both present and former.

It gives us one of those little touchstones many of us need — a warm feeling a fast-food chain will never match.



# Kroll's burgers stack up as the best

**By Sean Schultz**

Press-Gazette

"A lot of people say it's the toasted rolls. Others say it's the butter. I don't really know," said Pat Kroll Van Der Perren, president of Kroll's West.

"There's no secret recipe."



**Van Der Perren**

Kroll's hamburgers must have some magic formula to them, though, because they came in tops in the best-burger category.

For voter Jeanne Lang of Green Bay, Kroll's burgers won because of the hard roll and the pat of melted butter on top, which she said makes the hamburgers so juicy.

"Whenever we have out-of-town guests, we always take them to Kroll's," she said.

Perhaps longevity has something to do with it. The Kroll family has been broiling burgers for more than 50 years.

While 95 votes were cast for Kroll's burgers, most respondents didn't indicate whether the best on a bun came from Kroll's East or West.

It doesn't matter too much, Van Der Perren said. "We're all family."

However, the two facilities are separate entities.

Van Der Perren said her parents, Caroline and the late Harry Kroll, founded the first Kroll's restaurant in 1936 at 1658 Main St. in what was then



Press-Gazette photo by Joan E. Gutheridge

**Top burger:** Vice President Ray Kroll, left, and President Jim Schauer run Kroll's East.

the town of Preble.

Forty-five years ago, Van Der Perren said, her parents sold that restaurant to Harry's sister and brother-in-law, Isabel and Richard Schauer. That couple's son, Jim Schauer, is president of Kroll's East today and his uncle, Ray Kroll, is vice president.

The Harry Krolls went on to operate a restaurant in the

Labor Temple and then in 1958 opened a Kroll's restaurant in downtown Green Bay. Urban renewal forced them to leave that location and Kroll's West opened at 1990 S. Ridge Road in Ashwaubenon 15 years ago.

Van Der Perren and her mother operated it at first. Today her mother is retired and

her son-in-law, Mike Wier, is vice president.

Jim Schauer lists the favored four attributes of Kroll's hamburgers: the German-style, hard semmel rolls; the Wisconsin butter that oozes out of the sandwich; the freshly made, specially seasoned hamburger meat, and the cooking process over live charcoal.

Kroll's burgers are the only ones for Rosalie Shier of Green Bay, who scorns fast-food chains' hamburgers. "They know how to do a job right," she said, adding "I like the buns, I like the burgers, I like the onions, I like the price."

Both restaurants do a brisk carryout business — way out. They have many former customers who now live out of town or out of state. Relatives and friends in Green Bay stop in, have some burgers packaged to go, and ship them off.

Schauer said Kroll's burgers have traveled to every state in the nation. He said Chicagoans who vacation in Door County during the summer frequently stop in to stock up on burgers and chili on their way back home.

Chili and cleanliness edged their way into the vote. Green Bay's Mary Pasch not only loves the butter and the crunchy buns, but also the chili and Kroll's cleanliness.

Gerald DeBauche of Bellevue said, "The butter is just delicious, and the crispy buns. "They've got just the right amount of burger, and the price is right. And then they have really good chili."

# Restaurant co-founder Caroline Kroll, 94, dies

10-cent burgers sold out of Main Street location in 1936

BY JEFF ASH

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Kroll's West in Ashwaubenon will be closed Tuesday to honor the memory of Caroline M. Kroll, who in 1936 co-founded the popular local restaurant.

She died Thursday at Rennes Health Center in De Pere. She was 94.

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Kroll, a New York City native, met her husband, Harry, when he worked on a construction crew on the George Washington

Bridge. They were married in 1930 and moved to Green Bay. By the next year, they were running the Kutska Hotel, a boarding house. Caroline cooked the meals.

In 1936, they opened the first Kroll's Restaurant in a 10-foot-by-10-foot building at 1658 Main St. in what then was the town of Preble and now is



Kroll

Green Bay's southeast side. There, they charged 10 cents for a charcoal-grilled hamburger slathered in butter and served on a hard roll.

"And that was a high-priced hamburger," she said in a 1981 interview with the Green Bay Press-Gazette's Don Langenkamp. "Most of 'em were only a nickel then."

After expanding the restaurant, the Krolls sold it in 1945 to Harry's sister, Isabel, and her husband, Richard Schauer. Harry and Caroline opened another restaurant in the Labor Temple in downtown Green Bay in 1939, then opened another Kroll's at 509

Main St. in downtown Green Bay in 1958.

When the construction of Port Plaza Mall cost them the second Main Street location, the Krolls debated whether they should stay in business. But in 1974, they opened Kroll's West across the street from Lambeau Field at 1990 S. Ridge Road.

"Harry and I were split on that," Caroline said in the 1981 interview. "He wanted to retire then, and I wanted to keep going. As it turned out, I was right. It was hard to leave that place downtown. But everyone said we should have a Kroll's on the west side, and

we finally did."

Harry Kroll died in 1976. Today, Kroll's West is owned by Mike Wier, who is married to the Krolls' granddaughter, Roberta.

Caroline Kroll is survived by a daughter, two grandchildren and five great-grandchildren — two of whom run Kroll's South Loop in Chicago.

Visitation will be from 4 to 8 p.m. Monday at Proko-Wall Funeral Home, 1630 E. Mason St., Green Bay, and from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. Tuesday at St. Philip the Apostle Church, 312 Victoria St., Green Bay. Funeral services are at 10 a.m. Tuesday at the church.

# Basils II

## 5595 S Hwy P

## Denmark WI 54208



Basils II Bar & Grill was built and established by Bob and Nancy Kroll in 1984.

The building burnt on Jan 8, 1993, and reopened for business in February of 1993. After 17 years Bob and Nancy sold the business to their two sons Duke and Sam Kroll in March 2001. To this day Basils is well known for their charcoal cooked, butter burgers. Over 670,000 pounds of charcoal have been used to cook over 1,404,00 hamburgers, and over 50,500 pounds of butter have been used to make them irresistible.